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IN THE BELTWAY

Sting the gunships

Two conservative Republican members of the Senate Intelligence Committee — Chic Hecht of Nevada and Orin Hatch of Utah — have told the Pentagon that they would like to see the United States provide Afghan resistance fighters with Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. The missiles could be used to knock down the dreaded Soviet Mi-24 HIND helicopter gunships, known as flying tanks.

But the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA are throwing cold water on the idea. Some Pentagon analysts also fear that the Stingers are too sophisticated for use by the rough and ready Afghan freedom fighters.

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